

SafeUT FY23 Funding Letter of Support

January 31, 2022



The SafeUT Commission is proud to share the life-saving impact of the SafeUT crisis chat and school safety tip smartphone app resulting from the State's investment in the program. In FY21, our licensed mental health counselors responded to **30,527 unique chats and tips** with **more than 870,000 back-and-forth crisis messages** with users in need. There were **298 life-saving interventions** initiated for SafeUT users actively attempting or at imminent risk of suicide. Additionally, there were **256 threat and act of violence tips** submitted that required coordination with school officials and/or law enforcement officers and kept schools safer for Utah students.

SafeUT is on pace for **12% growth in the current fiscal year (FY22)**, projecting **34,190 unique chats and tips** with more than **1 million back-and-forth crisis messages** with users in need. This substantial utilization growth is being managed with the same operating budget from last FY21 as **no funding increases were provided for FY22**.

With ongoing stress and trauma from the pandemic, we anticipate increasing levels of mental health challenges in schools for students, educators, and parents. We are **projecting 15% growth in FY23** due to expanded SafeUT awareness and utilization, increased higher education utilization, and increasing levels of acuity and complexity of workload required to manage crisis chats and tips.

To be adequately staffed and prepared to support our community 24/7/365, the SafeUT Commission is **requesting \$1,207,123 in additional funding in FY23**. These requested funds would be utilized for:

- **\$1,207,123 ongoing funding to cover structural deficit + program growth + rising costs**
 - A structural deficit has been created by retaining master's level clinicians through necessary market increases in a highly competitive labor market, while staffing challenges due to labor constraints have kept operating costs artificially low.
 - SafeUT is currently **recruiting for 6.7 FTE in FY22** to mitigate short staffing.
 - Without increased funding in current FY22, inflationary and marketplace dynamics have caused a strain in our system of care.
 - To meet current demand and manage projected volume growth for next fiscal year, SafeUT needs **10.32 additional FTE in FY23** to reach appropriate staffing levels.
 - Requested ongoing funds would support increases of **\$707,491 in salaries and \$255,418 in benefits** for existing and additional master's level mental health clinicians, who can be challenging to recruit and retain due to the nationwide healthcare worker shortage and competitive market.
 - SafeUT benefitted from one-time CARES Act funding and a significant one-time private donation in FY21 but cannot rely on this in current or future years.

"A Performance Audit of the University Neuropsychiatric Institute and Crisis Services" conducted by the Office of the Legislative Auditor General in 2018-19 revealed SafeUT has been historically underfunded due to challenges with predicting how successful this program would be. **The audit found a high level of stewardship of public dollars**, and that previous growth had been subsidized by the University of Utah hospital system, requiring annual requests to the legislature to adequately fund SafeUT operations.

We welcome the opportunity to return to this committee annually and report on our funding compared to operating costs, outline key success metrics, and share our strategic goals and aspirations for ongoing emotional and mental health support to Utahns in need. We commend and thank the legislature for the visionary investment in these life-saving services and appreciate the opportunity to share how SafeUT can continue to grow and make a meaningful impact in our state and lives of Utahns.

With Gratitude,
The SafeUT Commission

SafeUT Commission Voting Members	
Ric Cantrell – Utah Attorney General Chief of Staff	Rep. Steven Eliason – Utah State House of Representatives
Spencer Jenkins – Utah System of Higher Education	Missy Wilson Larsen – Representative of the Public
Rachel Lucynski – Huntsman Mental Health Institute	Amy Mikkelsen – Utah Department of Health
Barbara Stallone – Representative of the Public	Sen. Daniel Thatcher – Utah State Senate
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